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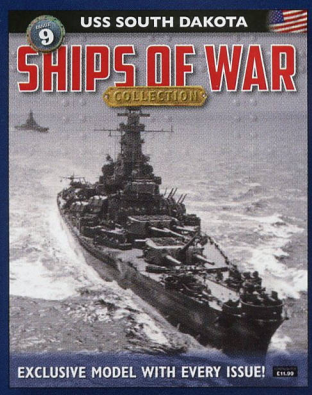
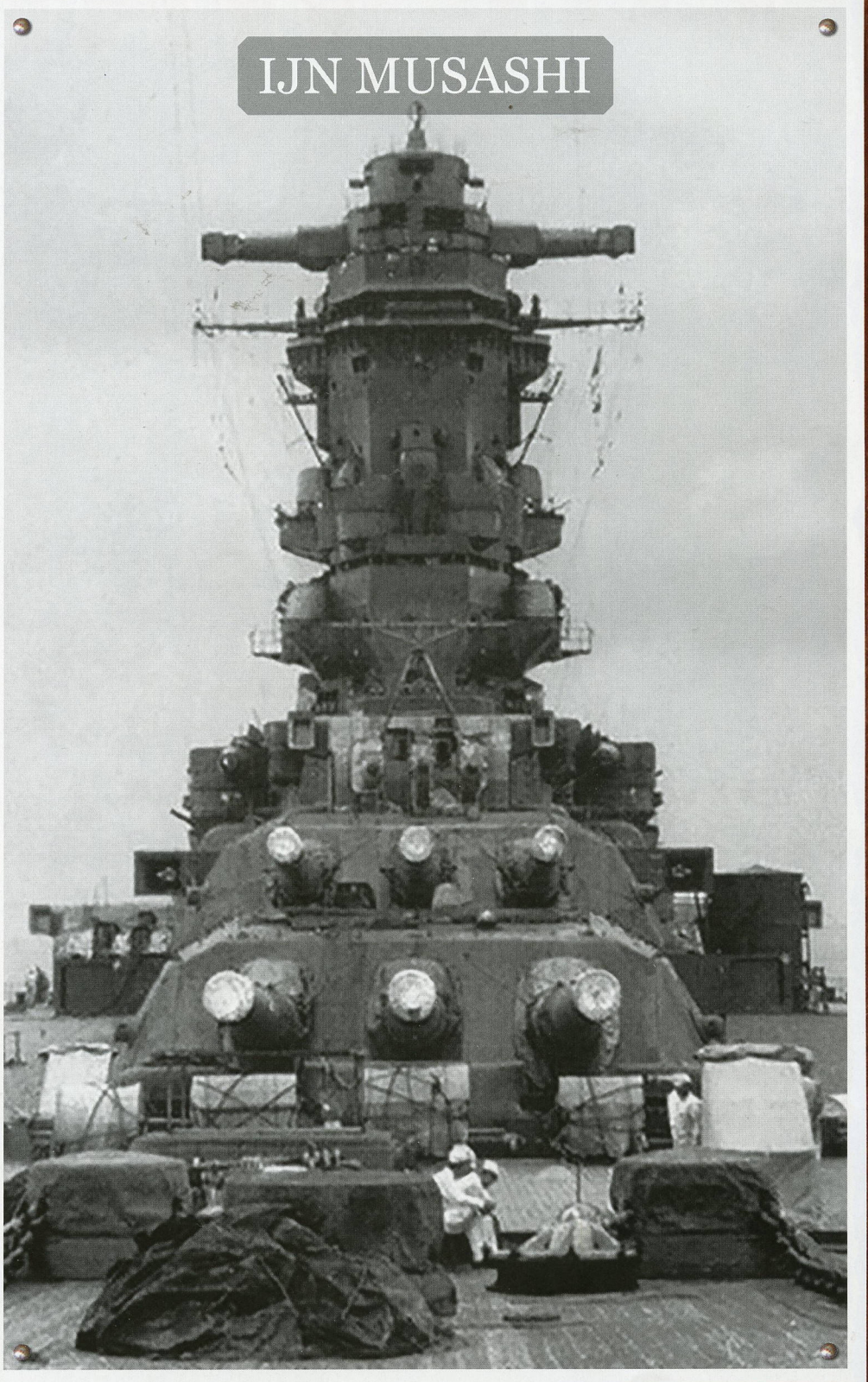


IJN MUSASHI



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LAUNCH

In 1937, as part of the 3rd Reinforcement Programme, the Imperial Japanese Navy ordered the construction of two new battleships, *Yamato* and *Musashi*. The two warships were the product of Japan's dissatisfaction with the terms of interwar naval treaties that put limits on the capital ships it could construct. After turning its back on these restrictions, the resulting vessels were the most powerful battleships that ever put to sea.

THE KEEL OF the battleship *Musashi* was laid down on the slipway of the Mitsubishi Industries dockyard in Nagasaki on 29 March 1938. Between May and November of the same year, work continued on sister vessel *Yamato*, which received its boilers, reduction gear and steam turbines at the Kure Navy Yard.

The *Musashi* was laid down a full five months after the *Yamato*, but thanks to a more rapid rate of construction, the yard was able to install the machinery in the *Musashi* at approximately the same time as equivalent work was being undertaken on its sister-ship.

In order to deliver the huge 460mm (18.1in) main guns and their turrets that were to provide the *Musashi* with her primary armament, a special freighter named *Kashino* was constructed at the Mitsubishi Industries dockyard.

At the time of her launch on 1 November 1940, the *Musashi* set a weight record for a ship launched from a conventional slipway – displacing a total of 35,737 tons.

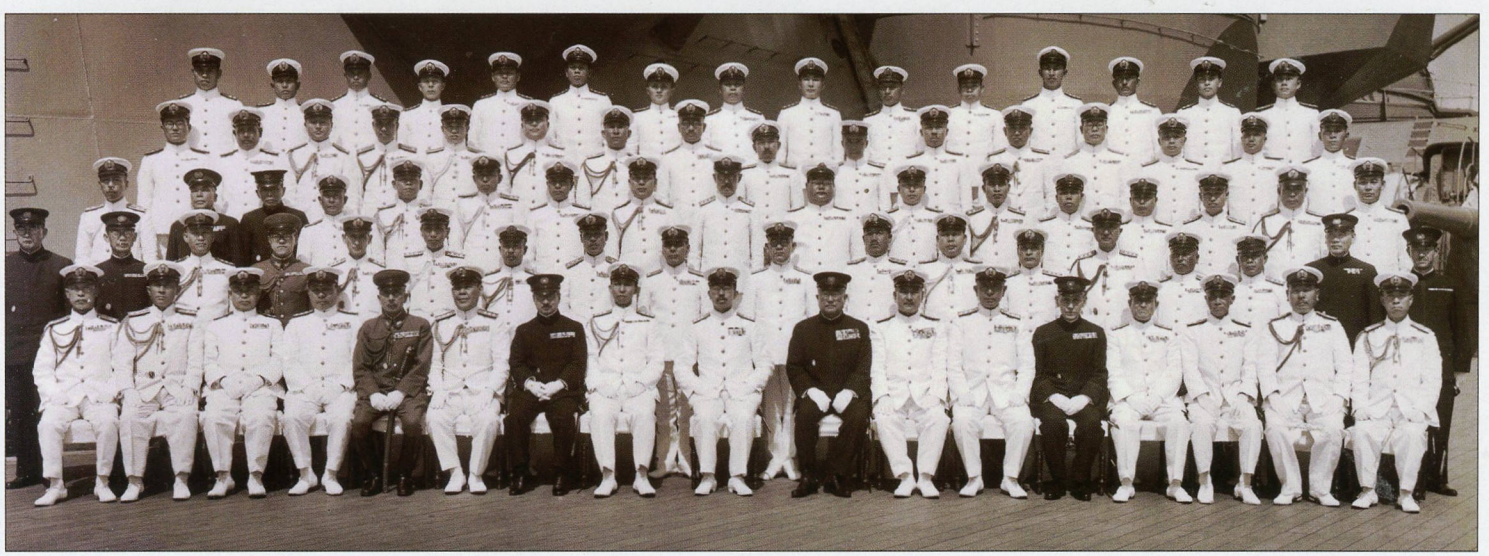
In early October 1941 the freighter *Kashino* transported the first of the gun barrels for the new battleship, and the ship would continue to make regular trips between the Kure Naval Ordnance Arsenal and Nagasaki until the *Musashi* was finally fully armed.

The fortunes of the new battleship changed in the summer of 1942 when the IJN took the decision to complete the *Musashi* with flagship accommodation. The resultant changes added another three months to the construction time. The battleship was moved from Nagasaki to Kure in order for fitting out to be completed and for trials to begin. *Musashi* was finally completed on 5 August 1942 and was commissioned into service with the IJN on the same date.

Once in service, the *Musashi* was assigned to Battleship Division One, together with *Yamato*, *Nagato* and *Mutsu*. In practice, however, *Musashi* remained at Kure for another five months in order to complete fitting out as a flagship and in order to run further trials. These trials took place alongside crew training in the Inland Sea.

In September 1942, *Musashi* received Type 21 radar and additional anti-aircraft armament. The latter consisted of four more 25mm mounts on the main deck, fore and aft of the triple 155mm (6.1in) secondary turrets, on both the port and starboard sides.

December 1942 found *Musashi* still working up in the Inland Sea, alongside the battleships *Nagato*, *Yamashiro* and *Fuso*. Early trials revealed a number of modifications were still required, and these were completed once she had finished training. Finally, in January 1943, the IJN's new battleship was ready for action. On the 22nd, the *Musashi* was transferred to Truk. Befitting her new role as flagship, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto transferred his flag from the *Yamato* to the *Musashi* on 11 February 1943.



Emperor Hirohito of Japan (front row centre) is photographed with officers of the Imperial Navy on board the battleship* Musashi *off Yokosuka Naval Base on 24 June 1943.

Early actions, 1943-44

ALTHOUGH Admiral Yamamoto had transferred his flag to the *Musashi* in February 1943, the battleship would remain on the sidelines of the Pacific War for a little while longer. In March and April both the *Musashi* and her sister *Yamato* remained uninvolved in the on-going Pacific campaign, a situation that lasted until May 1943. In the meantime, the IJN's older battleships *Kongo* and *Haruna*, which were also based at Truk, were heavily engaged in the fighting at Guadalcanal.

The IJN was struck a terrible blow on 18 April 1943, when US Army Air Force Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighters shot down the Mitsubishi G4M aircraft that was transporting Admiral Yamamoto. The Americans had managed to break Japanese codes and were able to stage an ambush of the admiral's transport. Not only was the IJN's commander killed, but the loss of two aircraft also led to the deaths of most of his staff. The new fleet commander of the IJN was Admiral Mineichi Koga, who was appointed by early May.

On 17 May 1943, *Musashi* departed Truk and headed for Yokosuka. The battleship had the solemn duty of transporting the ashes of Admiral Yamamoto to Tokyo for his state funeral.

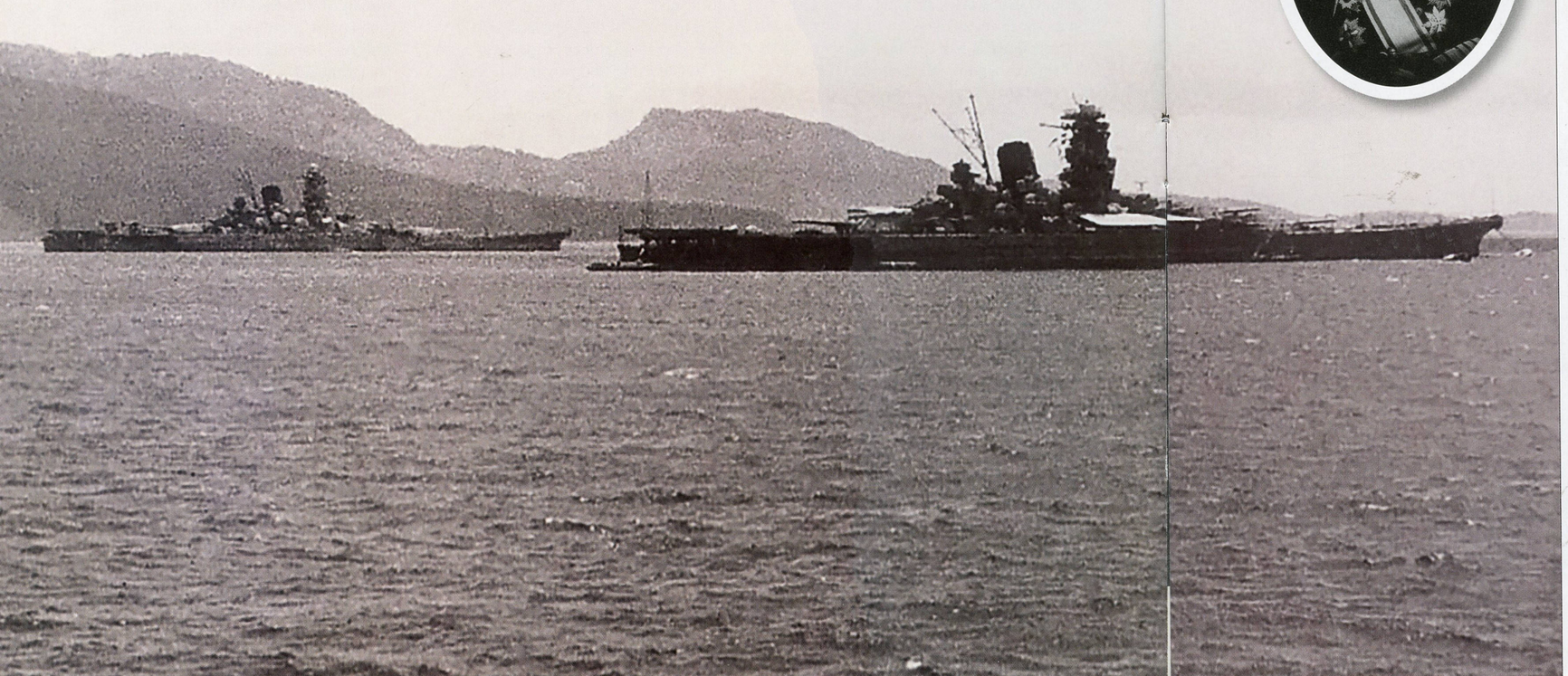
By June 1943, *Musashi* had been prepared for an inspection tour by officials of the Navy Yard. Another visitor to the battleship was the Japanese Emperor Hirohito, who took dinner on board the vessel as part of his official tour. Hirohito's visit would be the only time that the emperor visited either of Japan's two 'super-battleships'.

The following month, July, saw both *Musashi* and *Yamato* undergo a refit and improvements at the Kure Navy Yard. The two vessels were put into dry dock to allow cleaning and painting of their hulls, and the opportunity was also taken to repaint the entire ships, this work extending to the superstructure and armament.

With the refit of the two battleships now complete, *Musashi* and *Yamato* were able to set sail for Truk, *Musashi* being

Above: ***The ashes of Admiral Yamamoto (inset) being carried on* Musashi.**

Left: **Musashi *and* Yamato *at rest in Truk Lagoon in early 1943.***



the first to depart Kure, followed by her sister in mid-August.

In September 1943, US forces in the Pacific mounted an attack on Tarawa. Held by the Japanese, this island fortress was to be invaded after its defences had been 'softened up' by US carrier-based aircraft. The IJN was called to the island's defence, and a powerful task force from the Combined Fleet left Truk to head for Eniwetok atoll. However, the force sent to the area did not include *Musashi*, the battleship instead being held in reserve at Truk lagoon.

After the anti-climax of the Tarawa operation, when the IJN task force had failed to make contact with the US Navy, October found the IJN concerned that the US was now planning to attack Wake Island. With the aim of catching the US fleet before it was able to deal a blow against Wake, Admiral Koga assembled a force comprising the *Musashi*, *Yamato*, *Nagato*, *Fuso*, *Kongo*, *Haruna*, two fleet carriers, one light carrier and a considerable force of heavy cruisers, light cruisers and destroyers. Koga's force took up station some 250nm south of Wake Island, but was again unable to make contact with the enemy. At the end of October, the warships headed back to Truk, after another disappointing effort. In the event, the US forces then attacked both Wake and the Marshall Islands in early November, once the IJN had vacated the area.

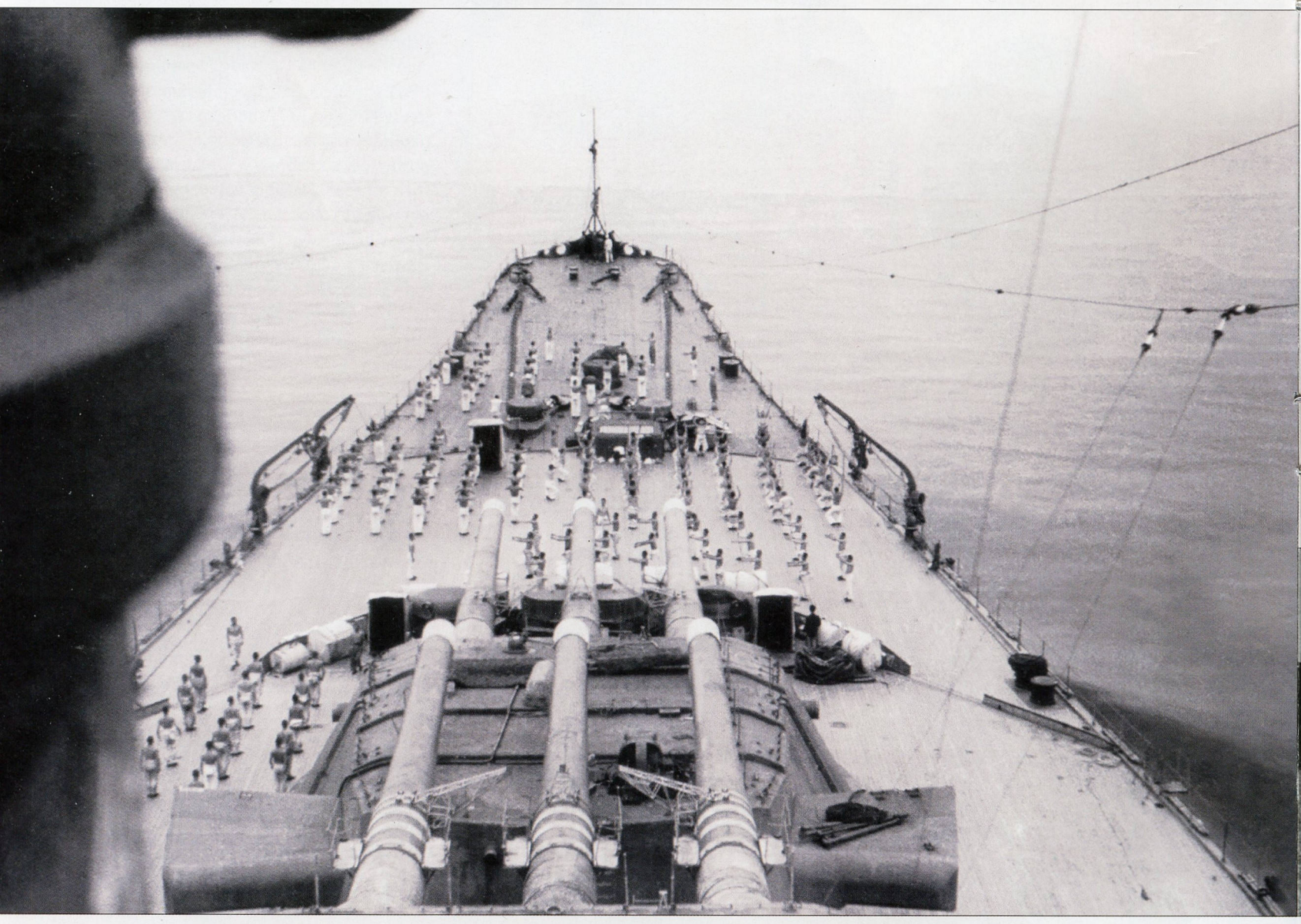
The *Musashi* would remain at Truk with other units of the Combined Fleet until February 1944. On the 4th of that month, an over-flight by US Navy Consolidated PB4Y Privateer patrol bombers indicated to the IJN that the Americans were planning a strike using carrier-based air power. On 10 February, *Musashi*, together with other IJN surface combatants, made her way to Yokosuka. As a result, the battleship evaded the attentions of US Navy carrier aircraft that pounded Truk between 17 and 18 February. It was a lucky escape as these devastating raids succeeded in sinking two IJN light cruisers, three destroyers and 35 other naval and support vessels. In addition, a total of 250 Japanese aircraft were destroyed on the ground. Once docked at Yokosuka on 15 February, the *Musashi* took on troops and supplies before departing for Palau on 24 February. Befitting its role as flagship, Admiral Koga took his quarters aboard *Musashi*.

On her way to Palau, *Musashi* encountered an enormous typhoon. Having avoided action with the enemy thus far, the typhoon would be the biggest test yet for the battleship and her crew. When the *Musashi* entered the storm, she was being escorted by three destroyers. Having taken on troops and supplies at Yokosuka, the battleship's deck was loaded with munitions, fuel and vehicles. Almost all were washed overboard by the typhoon, while stores that remained were thrown overboard by her crew to prevent further damage. Meanwhile, the

conditions below decks were made worse by the additional troops that had been taken on, leading to overcrowded quarters. The *Musashi* was forced to slow to just 6kts to prevent losing sight of her slower destroyer escorts. It was with relief that the warships finally arrived at Palau on 29 February 1944.

With a US air offensive threatened once again, the *Musashi* prepared to leave Palau, sailing on 29 March 1944. This time, the great battleship headed for the Philippines. Admiral Koga decided to disembark, and instead head to the Philippines by aircraft. On the day of her departure from Palau, the *Musashi* was struck by a torpedo. The battleship was just leaving the channel and moving into the open sea when a single torpedo hit, at around 18.00hrs. In fact, the US Navy submarine USS *Tunny* had launched a total of six torpedoes, but only one found its mark. 'Torpedoes approaching from port at 135 degrees. Sound battle stations!' rang out chief navigator Sadae Ikeda's announcement. After impacting the port bow, the torpedo tore a hole in the battleship and led to flooding of the forward compartments. In all, an estimated 3,000 tons of water rushed into the ship's hull. 'Stability unchanged. Cruising speed of 26kts possible. No other damage beside the rupture on the port bow', Captain Bunji Asakura reported. The *Musashi* stopped for the night in order for repairs to be undertaken. Once

Under the shadow of its mighty guns, members of* Musashi*'s crew carry out keep fit drills on the ship's extensive foredeck.



these had been completed, the *Musashi* headed off once again, now with the aim of reaching Kure.

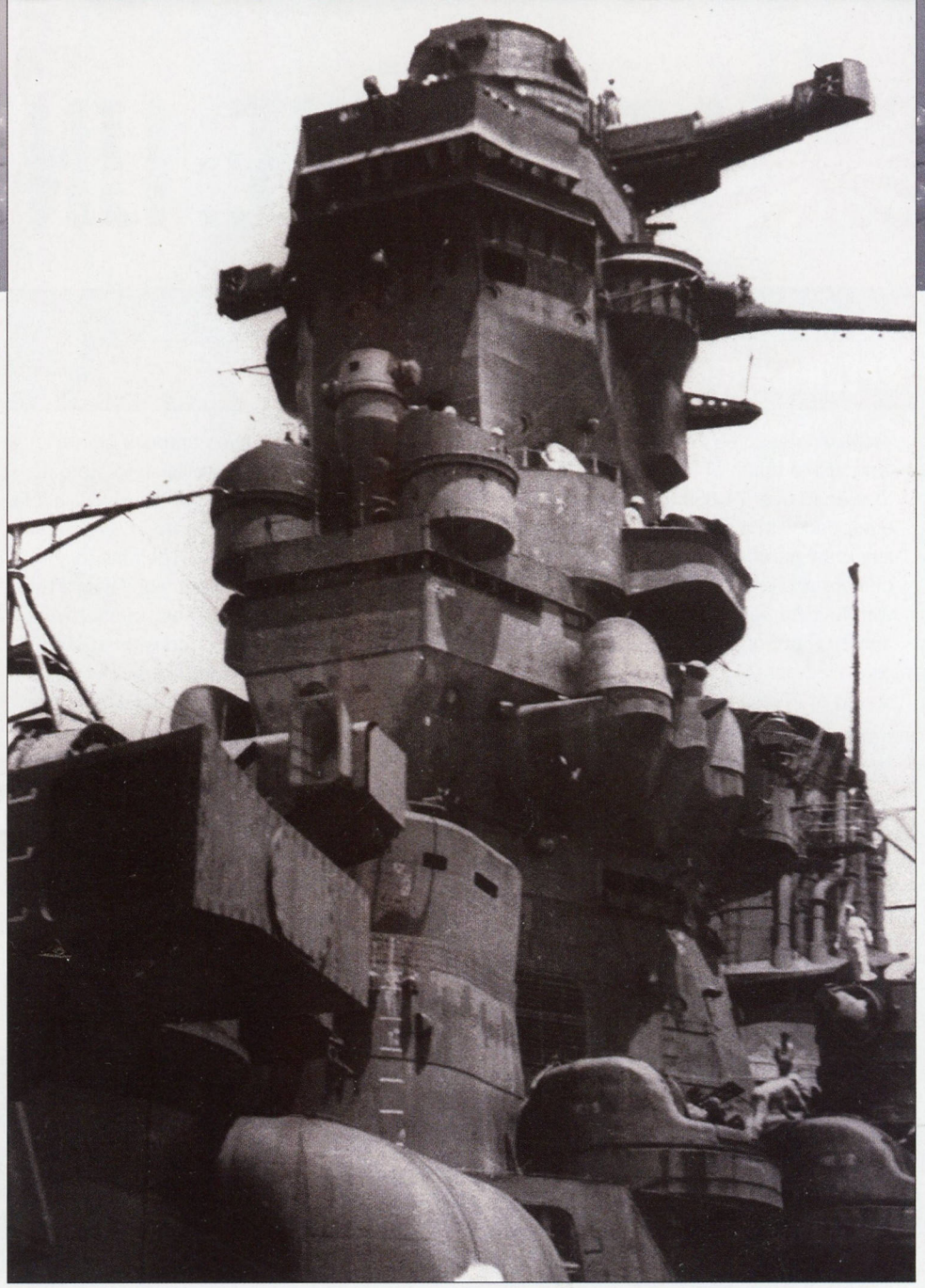
While Admiral Koga's decision to take an aircraft to his destination had spared him the near-miss of the attack by the *Tunny*, there was worse for him to come. Koga and his staff took off from Palau on 31 March 1944 in two Kawanishi H8K flying boats. The four-engined aircraft ran into another typhoon, however, and would never reach the Philippines. Both crashed, and the only survivor was Vice Admiral Fukudone, Koga's Chief of Staff.

Arriving at Kure on 3 April 1944, the *Musashi* entered a period of repair, to make good the results of the torpedo hit. The battleship went into dry dock to allow access to the hull and repair the battle damage. At the same time, the decision was taken to introduce some of the modifications that had already been made to *Yamato*. However, efforts were hampered by a lack of available materials. In the event, modifications were made to the superstructure, but plans to add 127mm (5in) twin gun mounts had to be abandoned in favour of a stopgap installation of 25mm triple anti-aircraft guns. Other alterations included a Type 13 radar antenna on the mainmast, and additional 25mm gun directors. From the end of April until early May, the *Musashi* was engaged in post-refit trials. Once complete, the battleship was prepared to sail for Okinawa. On 10 May, she left Kure, in company with six light carriers and destroyers.

On 16 May, the *Musashi* arrived at the IJN anchorage at Tawi Tawi, off the northern coast of Borneo, having routed here from Okinawa. Once there, the battleship joined Battle Division 1, under the command of Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa's Mobile Fleet. This latter formation then consisted of *Musashi*, *Yamato* and *Nagato* (Battle Division 1), *Fuso* (Battle Division 2), and *Kongo* and *Haruna* (Battle Division 3).

The powerful collection of warships assembled under Ozawa's Mobile Fleet undertook battle exercises and joint gunnery trials in the Sulu Sea between late May and early June 1944, working alongside IJN cruisers and destroyers. Demonstrating their firepower, both *Musashi* and *Yamato* put shells on to a target at a distance of 22nm.

On 27 May 1944 the US had invaded the island of Biak, on the northwest coast of New Guinea. The Japanese response saw the IJN's Mobile Fleet sail from Tawi Tawi in three groups. These departed the anchorage between 30 May and 11 June. Accompanied by cruisers and destroyers, *Musashi* and *Yamato* left Tawi Tawi on 10 June, but ran into trouble soon after when a submarine periscope was sighted. In the confusion that followed, the two battleships almost collided with each other.



The main superstructure of the* Musashi *topped by fire control directors and main battery rangefinder, beneath which is the Combat Bridge.

After plans to relieve Biak were cancelled, the *Musashi* and *Yamato* instead joined up with other elements of the Mobile Fleet on 17 June 1944. The task was now to repulse the US invasion of Guam and Saipan, in the Mariana Islands. This was the beginning of the great Battle of the Philippine Sea, and the IJN's initial response was to launch hundreds of attacks on the US Navy's invasion fleet by carrier-based aircraft. The unfortunate result for the Japanese would become known as the 'Great Marianas Turkey Shoot', such was the dominance of the US naval air power by this stage of the war.

FACT FILE: IJN MUSASHI

SPECIFICATIONS

Musashi measured 263m (862ft 10in) long with a beam of 36.9m (121ft 1in) and displaced over 71,659 tons when fully equipped with a draft of 10.86m (35.6ft). Her crew numbered between 2,500-2,800 officers and enlisted men. She was fitted with four Kampon geared steam turbines and 12 Kampon water-tube boilers which propelled her to an impressive maximum speed of 27kts.

RADAR

Installation of the Type 21 radar was carried out in September 1942, after the battleship had been commissioned but before she had completed trials and training. The huge antenna for the radar was mounted atop the main gun director arms.

During the *Musashi*'s July 1943 refit, the opportunity was taken to install another radar, the Type 22, on the top of the bridge, on both port and starboard sides.

AIRCRAFT

Provided with two catapults on her quarterdeck and provision to store up to seven floatplanes in her below-decks hangar, *Musashi* operated two different models of floatplane. The Mitsubishi F1M2 'Pete' biplane (below) was a two-seat observation aircraft for short-range work and was provided with armament of three 7.7mm (0.303in) machine guns and two 60kg (132lb) bombs. The Aichi E13A1 'Jake' monoplane was a three-seat reconnaissance aircraft offering longer range; up to 2,089km (1,298 miles) compared to 741km (460 miles) for the F1M2. The E13A1 was armed with a single 7.7mm machine gun plus four 60kg bombs or one 250kg (551lb) bomb. A 6-tonne crane mounted at the stern was used to recover the aircraft. The *Musashi* could accommodate three E13A1s and four F1M2s.

FIREPOWER

Primary armament

The Type 94 main guns of the *Musashi* and *Yamato* were colossal weapons with a bore of 460mm (18.1in) and were the largest-calibre guns ever fitted to a warship. Including the breech, each gun weighed over 160 tons and had a length of 21.13m (831.9in). The guns fired a Type 91 armour-piercing projectile that weighed 1,460kg (3,219lb) and left the barrel with a muzzle velocity of 780m (2,559ft) per second. The Type 94 was able to engage targets at a maximum range of 42km (26 miles) and could be elevated to an angle of 45 degrees. At the maximum rate of fire, each gun could deliver two shells per minute. Each gun turret was armed with three Type 94 guns and weighed a total of 2,470 tons. The ammunition magazines typically provided a total of 1,000 rounds per gun.

Anti-aircraft armament

In April 1944, the battleship's defences were bolstered through the addition of 18 25mm Type 96 triple open gun mounts added on the superstructure and weather deck, plus 25 25mm single gun mounts installed on the weather deck. This provided for a revised defensive armament of 12 127mm (5in) Type 89 Model A-1-3 heavy anti-aircraft guns and a total of 115 25mm weapons. Thereafter, *Musashi*'s anti-aircraft defences were further enhanced when, in July 1944, the ship was fitted with another five 25mm triple open mounts located on the weather deck.

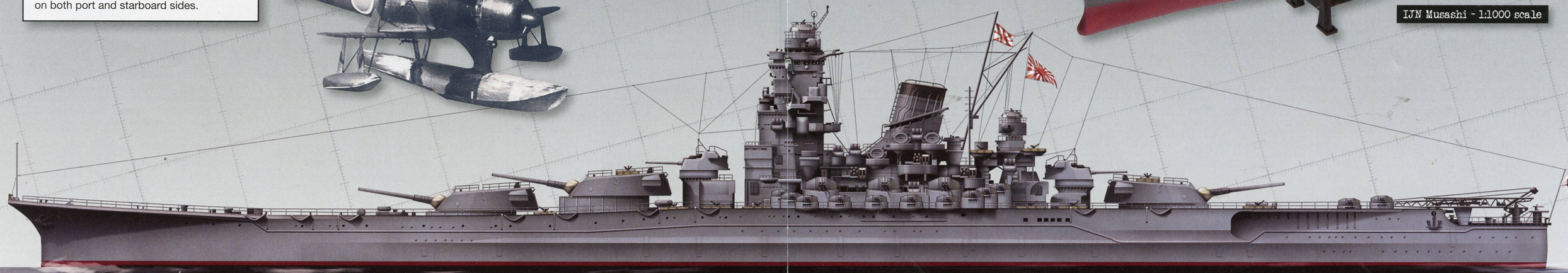
FUEL

The *Musashi* and *Yamato* were renowned for their prodigious fuel consumption. Each battleship had a storage capacity of 6,300 tons of fuel, which provided for a range of 8,600nm sailing at a speed of 19kts. However, when sailing at the battleships' maximum speed of 27kts, the range was dramatically reduced to 4,100nm. It was as a result of these calculations that the IJN preferred to hold the super-battleships back for larger battles, since employing the warships in smaller confrontations would consume stocks of fuel required for more important engagements.

CAMOUFLAGE

While anchored off Singapore between July and mid-October 1944, both *Musashi* and *Yamato* received a new very dark grey paint scheme for their upper decks. This colour was mixed using soot deposits from the battleships' funnels. In September 1944, *Musashi* also had her vertical surfaces painted in a very dark grey. This time, the colour was provided by stocks of former Royal Navy paint that had been left in Singapore.

IJN Musashi - 1:1000 scale



Preparing for battle

THE CATASTROPHE that befell the Imperial Japanese Navy's carrier air wings during the 'Great Marianas Turkey Shoot' had a sobering effect on the surface fleet, too. On 29 June 1944 the IJN's Mobile Fleet arrived back at the Navy Yard in Kure, having previously retreated north from its shellacking by the US Navy's carrier aircraft, stopping at Okinawa to take on fuel and stores, and then visiting various naval bases in the Japanese home islands.

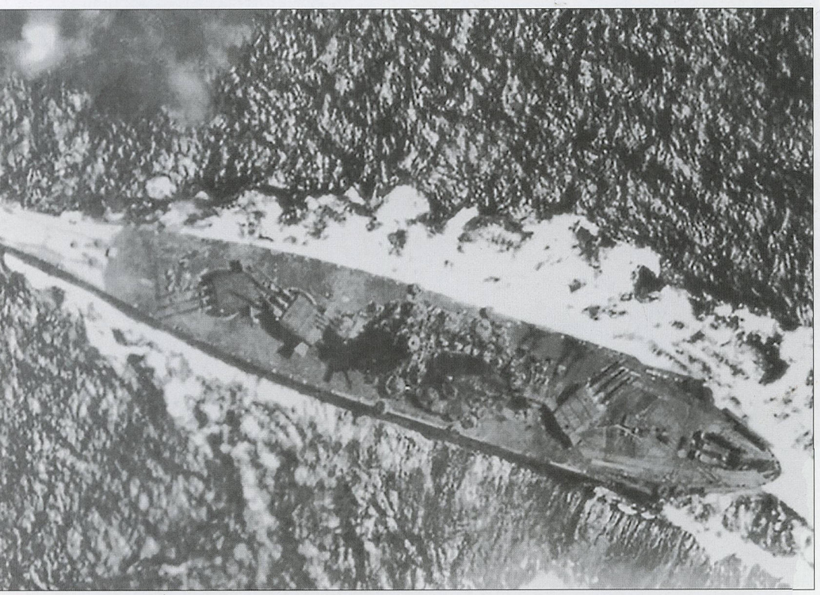
While at Kure, both the *Musashi* and *Yamato* underwent another series of modifications. The anti-aircraft armament of both warships was further bolstered, this time through the addition of five triple and five single 25mm open mounts on the main deck, located at the fore and aft ends of the superstructure. Related work had been completed by around 7 July 1944.

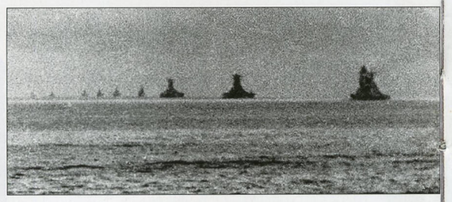
On 9 July 1944 the IJN's Mobile Force departed Kure and headed towards Okinawa. The *Musashi* and *Yamato* headed to their first objective in company with *Nagato* and *Kongo*, together with associated cruisers and destroyers. The force refuelled at Okinawa and then divided into two discrete groups.

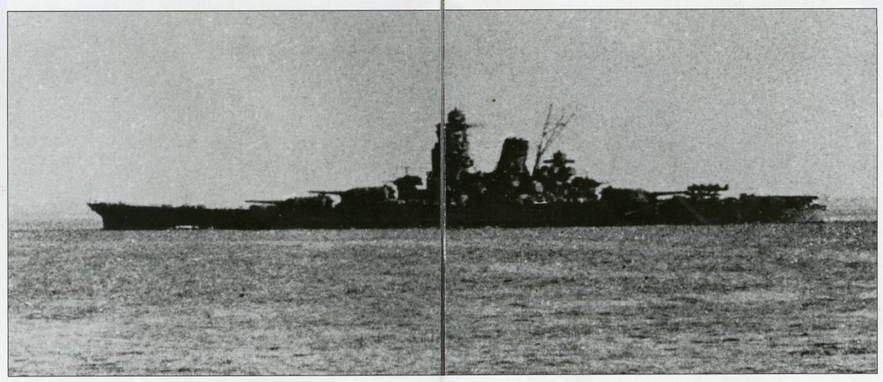
Group A comprised *Musashi* and *Yamato* together with cruisers and destroyers, and left Okinawa on 10 July. Its destination was the Lingga Roads anchorage, located to the south of Singapore. On its way there, Group A was split into two components; the two big battleships dropped anchor at Lingga Roads while the remaining cruisers and destroyers anchored at Singapore. The two groups both reached their destinations on 17 July 1944.

With the IJN expecting the next wave of US amphibious landings to hit the Philippine Islands, the Japanese warships would lie in wait at anchorages around Singapore. In order to prepare for the coming battle, the battleships *Musashi*, *Yamato*, *Nagato*, *Kongo* and *Haruna* took part in a series of gunnery drills, both day and night, testing their radar-guided fire-control systems. This work continued from July to October 1944, with a series of training events that saw crews practise for the impending battle.

On 18 October 1944 the *Musashi* and *Yamato*, accompanied by the battleships *Nagato*, *Fuso*, *Yamashiro*, *Kongo* and *Haruna* departed their Lingga Roads anchorage and headed towards Brunei Bay, on the northwest coast of the island of Borneo. Once at Brunei Bay, the battleships took on fuel and supplies and began preparations for the biggest showdown of the Pacific War.

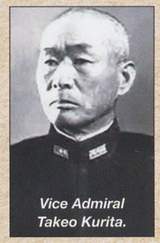




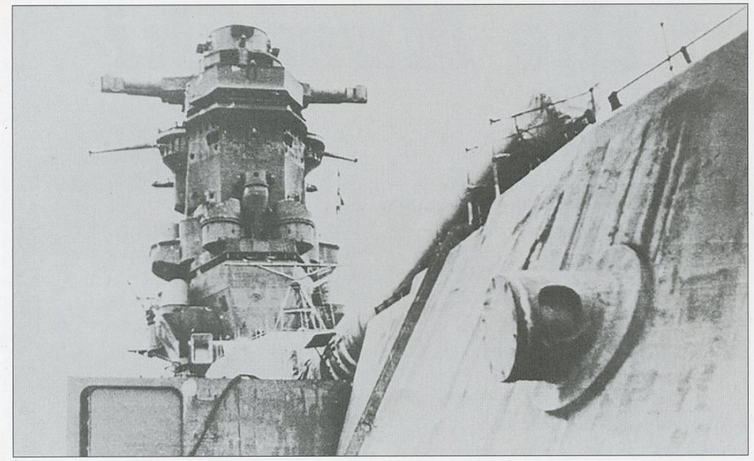


'Sho-Go'

Operation 'Sho-Go' (Victory) was a daring, but potentially reckless plan to deliver a decisive hammer-blow to the US fleet. Indeed, when first announced, many IJN officers were concerned that the strategic plan would end in disaster, especially bearing in mind the limited ability of the IJN's aircraft to provide much-needed support. It was left to Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita to reassure his officers that 'Sho-Go' was viable: 'The war is in its last stages. Imperial Headquarters has decided that the Navy is not strong enough to fight a decisive battle with the enemy. That is why, as a last resort, they have opted for a surprise attack. Once the order has been given, all we can do is proceed as planned.'



Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita.



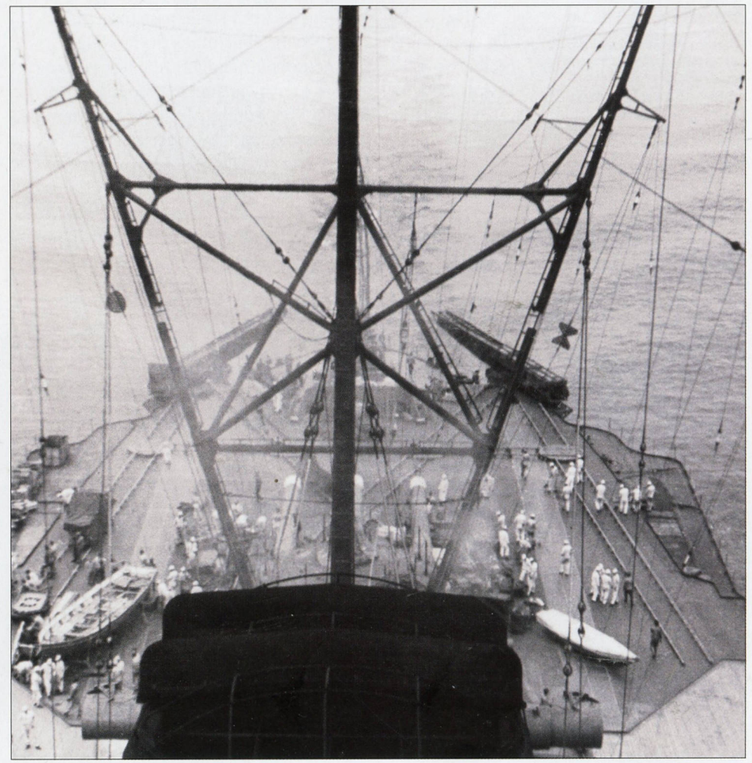
Above: ***Viewed from the side of its leading gun turret, the immense size of the* Musashi *and weight of its armour become apparent.***

Bottom left: ***'I couldn't believe how enormous they were!' said US Navy Helldiver gunner Joe Anderlik, speaking of the two Yamato class ships. 'Musashi was huge!' commented gunner Russ Dustan. 'I had never seen anything as big in my entire life. It was a magnificent sight.'***

Left: ***Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita's Force 'A' leaves Brunei Bay on 22 October 1944, en route to the Philippines.***

Right: ***View looking aft showing the ship's twin aircraft catapults.***

Below: **Musashi** ***leaves Brunei, Borneo in 1944 on its ill-fated final mission.***



The end of the *Musashi*

DURING FOUR dispersed and confused battles fought between 23 and 26 October 1944, the fighting ability of the Imperial Japanese Navy would be dismantled once and for all. Having lost the Marianas in August 1944, all that lay between the IJN and total defeat was a final throw of the dice... an all-out offensive against the US Navy that would involve all Japan's remaining capital ships and carriers in an effort to thwart the planned US amphibious landings in the Philippines.

At 17.00hrs on 18 October, Admiral Soemu Toyoda launched Operation 'Sho-Go' (Victory), with the aim of decimating the US forces stationed off Leyte. From the start, things did not run smoothly for the Japanese, and there were a series of false starts before the respective task forces set sail. In all, 'Sho-Go' would involve four IJN task forces, three of which were assigned the responsibility to attack, and the other to serve as a decoy.

Among the offensive task forces gathered from North Borneo and elsewhere were Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita's Force 'A', a portion of the 1st Striking Force, from Borneo, which was to pass through the San Bernardino Strait to strike US landing forces from the north off Samar. Kurita's Force 'A' was spearheaded by the *Musashi* and sister battleship *Yamato*, together with *Nagato*, *Kongo* and *Haruna*. Meanwhile, a 2nd Striking Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Kiyohide Shima (with just three heavy cruisers), was to join up with Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura's Force 'C', also from Borneo and part of the 1st Striking Force (including the battleships *Fuso* and *Yamashiro*, plus a heavy cruiser); these two forces would then pass through Surigao Strait to attack the landings from the south. Finally, the main carrier force, known as the First Mobile Fleet, under Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa, was intended to lure the American carriers away from the Philippines while the 1st and 2nd Striking Forces dealt with the landings and the warships designated to support them. The 1st and 2nd Striking Forces would then set about dealing with the returning US carriers, with *Musashi* and *Yamato* expected to play a key role.

The aim was for the three offensive task forces to strike through the San Bernardino and Surigao Straits at the US invasion fleets that were anchored off Leyte. At the same time, Vice Admiral Ozawa's First Mobile Fleet, which consisted of the *Zuikaku*, *Zuiho*, *Chitose* and *Chiyoda* (3rd Koku Sentai) plus the converted battleship-carriers *Ise* and *Hyuga*, would move into the Philippine Sea where it would draw off the powerful forces of Vice Admiral William S. Halsey's 3rd Fleet. However, most of Ozawa's air groups had been largely destroyed or moved to shore bases, leaving a much-depleted force of 116 aircraft to provide defensive cover. The available pilots were also mostly inexperienced.

On the morning of 22 October, as Allied forces were reported moving into the Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, *Kurita* and *Nishimura* set sail eastwards from Brunei Bay to split as pre-planned into the Sibuyan Sea and the Surigao Strait. Meanwhile, Shima's 2nd Striking Force came from Formosa southwards.

The stage was set for the climax of World War 2 in the Pacific and the greatest naval battle in history. Fought from 24 to 26 October, the confrontation known as the Battle of Leyte Gulf actually encompassed the Battles of the Sibuyan Sea, Surigao Strait, Samar Island and Cape Engano. As well as the naval combatants, carrier-based and land-based air power was also heavily involved, clashing in a series of fierce engagements over a vast area.

On 23 October, Halsey's Task Group 38.2 was positioned east of San Bernardino Strait in order to provide defensive protection of the landing beaches from an assault by the IJN surface forces that were approaching from the west. At dawn, a Curtiss SB2C Helldiver

EYEWITNESS REPORT

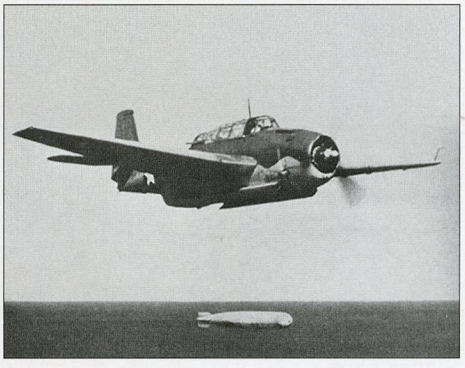
Captain Toshihira Inoguchi

Wounded in battle, Inoguchi went down with the *Musashi*, after bidding farewell to his second-in-command and ordering him to be responsible for the surviving crew. This extract is taken from his logbook, which he had wrapped tightly in oiled paper.

'On 24 October we were attacked by enemy aircraft. I greatly regret the loss of the ship, which was not only the hope of the Navy, but also the hope of the Japanese people. However, I am very pleased that almost no damage was sustained by the other vessels in the fleet in this battle. I somehow feel that, as the main target, the *Musashi* managed to save the fleet...

'Although I intend to fight this battle out to the end, it seems now that we have come to the end of the line. It is 18.55hrs. I would like to write down all my thoughts, but it is already dark. In the worst circumstances we will be forced to remove the portrait of the Emperor, lower the flag, and abandon ship.

'Nothing has been lost in my belief that this war must be won, and that our country should prosper eternally. Everyone, please fight to the last and ensure our final victory.'



The Japanese battleship **Musashi** *under intense attack by the US Navy's Task Force 38 aircraft in the Sibuyan Sea on 24 October 1944. Without adequate air cover* **Musashi** *was helpless against multiple waves of attacking aircraft. After the final attack ended, she suffered hits by 19 or 20 torpedoes, 17 bombs, and 18 near misses.*

US Navy 'ace of aces' David S. McCampbell.

The 'Fabled Fifteen'

Carrier Air Group 15 of the US Navy found fame in the Pacific, serving aboard the carrier USS *Essex* and including in its ranks the Navy's 'ace of aces' David S. McCampbell. The 'Fabled Fifteen' excelled during the Battle of the Philippine Sea, leading to an aerial battle known by its Grumman F6F Hellcat pilots as the 'Great Marianas Turkey Shoot'.

On 24 October 1944, during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, McCampbell and his wingman intercepted and attacked a force of approximately 60 enemy aircraft. Between them, they downed 15 confirmed kills and two 'probables'. The day after, McCampbell co-ordinated an air strike by three carrier air groups against Japanese targets, sinking an aircraft carrier, a light cruiser and two destroyers.

The 'Fabled Fifteen' continued to serve until November 1944, when the USS *Essex* concluded its cruise, establishing a record unmatched in the history of carrier warfare. As well as sinking the *Musashi*, three carriers and a heavy cruiser, for a total of 296,500 tons of enemy shipping, the air groups had shot down 318 enemy aircraft.

Fatally wounded,* Musashi*'s mighty bows lay low in the water.

flying from the carrier USS *Intrepid* was first to spot Kurita's 1st Striking Force. This marked the beginning of the Battle of the Sibuyan Sea.

By 10.27hrs, battle was formally engaged, and the *Musashi*'s massive guns went into action for the first time. A first strike was launched by aircraft from the *Intrepid* and the smaller carrier USS *Cabot*, resulting in the crippling of the heavy cruiser *Myoko* with a torpedo. Without Japanese aircraft to offer protection against the airborne attacks, *Musashi* was forced into firing its guns into the water to send up huge spouts of water aimed at knocking the attacking aircraft out of the air, or at least preventing them sighting their target. Jack Lawton, a US Navy pilot, recalled: 'Running into one of these geysers was like running into a mountain. I felt the muzzle blast each time they fired. I could swear the wings were ready to fold every time these huge shockwaves hit us.' The *Musashi*, meanwhile, received single hits from a torpedo and a bomb. 'Full turn to starboard! Reverse direction hard aport!' Shouted the chief navigator over the main deck speakers.

Remarkably, even after four torpedoes had hit, the *Musashi* still signalled to the *Yamato*: 'Can still travel at 24kts.'

The *Intrepid* air group was again involved in the final strike of the battle, joining aircraft from the carriers *Enterprise*, *Essex*, *Franklin* and *Cabot*. On sighting the *Musashi*, one of the sailors aboard the *Franklin*, gunner Russ Dustan, recalled: 'I had never seen anything as big in my entire life... It was huge.'

The last American attack was over by 15.30hrs. After repeated bomb and torpedo hits, the *Musashi* was finally crippled and listing heavily. It was later estimated that some 37 direct torpedo and bomb hits had been inflicted – including as many as 19 torpedoes. At 19.15hrs, Captain Toshihira Inoguchi retired to his cabin, intending to go down with his ship. The order to abandon ship came 15 minutes later and at 19.36hrs the *Musashi* capsized and sank. With the loss of the mighty battleship, the remainder of the force withdrew.

The conflicts of 24 to 26 October ended in a decisive victory for the US 3rd and 7th Fleets over the IJN, which lost three battleships, including the *Musashi*, all four aircraft carriers, 10 heavy and light cruisers, 11 destroyers and 288 aircraft.

EYEWITNESS REPORT

Captain Matsumoto

Matsumoto, who studied ship engineering at Tokyo University between the wars, was appointed a sub-lieutenant in naval construction and spent his career designing warships for the IJN. From February 1945 until the end of the war, he was a staff officer of the Combined Fleet.

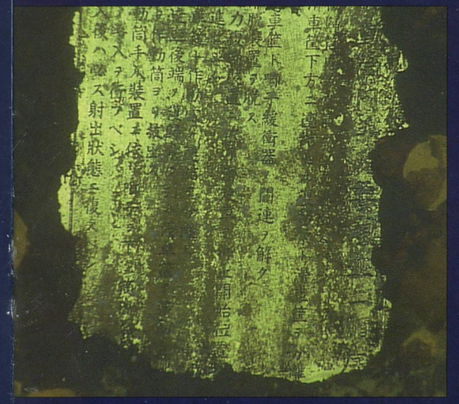
'The sinkings of the *Yamato* and the *Musashi* by US carrier-borne planes alone certainly did not prove that they were unusually vulnerable. They eventually sank only after they had displayed their immense resistance to the limit as planned. Admittedly, though they had some defects, they proved to be the toughest men-of-war ever built, at least by the defunct Japanese Navy.'

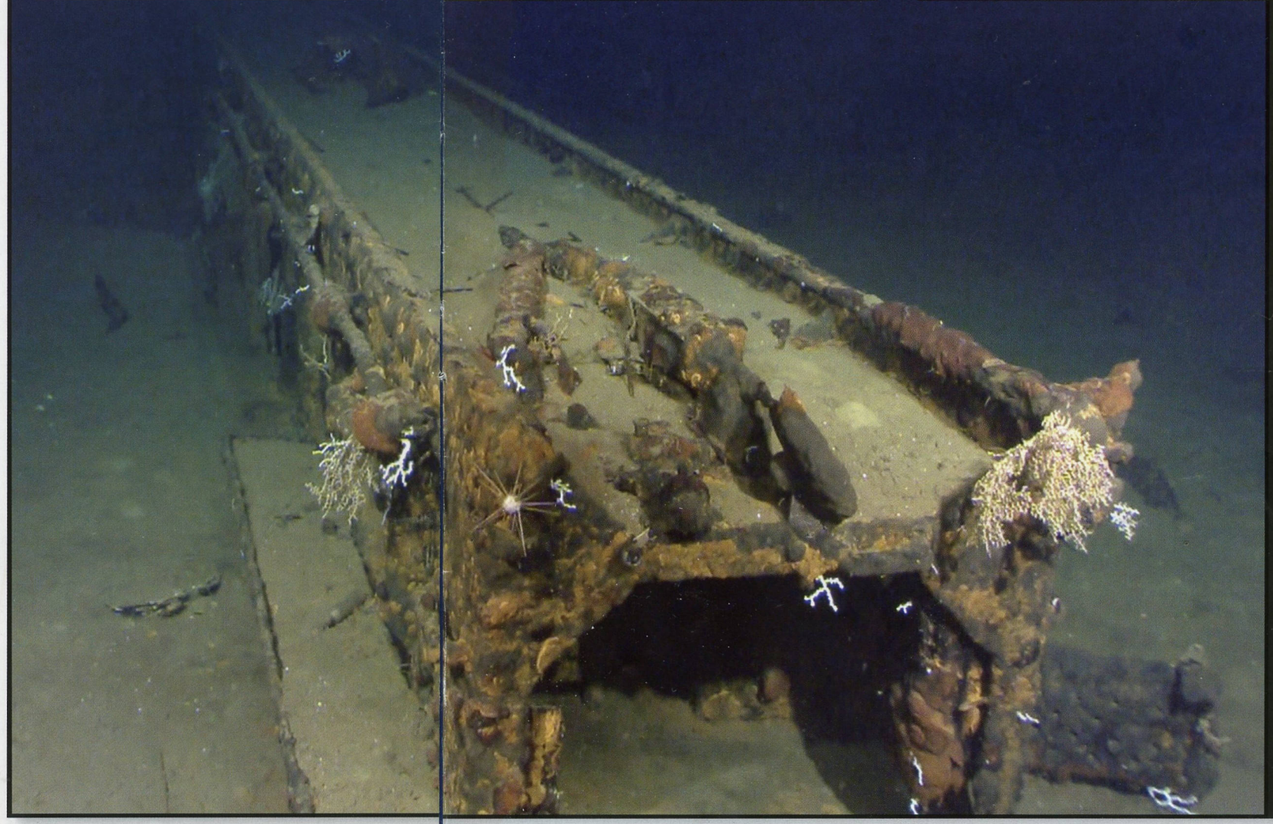
IN MEMORIAM

Of the 2,399 crew members of the *Musashi* on its final voyage, 1,376 were rescued by the destroyers *Kiyoshimo* and *Shimakaze*, which carried survivors to Corregidor Island.

Paul Allen, the multi-billionaire co-founder of Microsoft, finally discovered the wreck of the *Musashi* in the Sibuyan Sea off the Philippines in March 2015. 'WW2 Battleship *Musashi* sank 1944 is FOUND', Allen announced on Twitter, and posted an underwater photograph of the warship's bow still bearing the chrysanthemum crest of the Japanese Imperial family.

The remains of the battleship were located by a team from the *Octopus*, Allen's luxury yacht and undersea exploration vessel. According to Allen, the discovery of the wreck, at a depth of more than half a mile, was 'an important milestone in the annals of World War 2 naval history'.





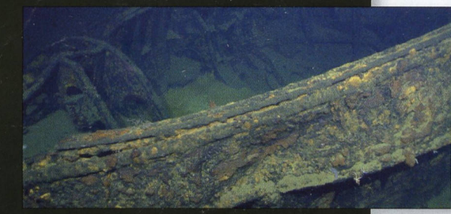
Above left: **Musashi *instruction panel.***

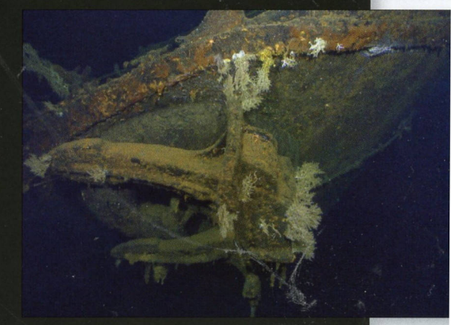
Above: ***The ghostly remains of* Musashi*'s teak chrysanthemum emblem on its prow.***

Left: ***Aircraft catapult rail.***

Below: ***Type 89 Model A-1-3 heavy anti-aircraft gun platform.***

Bottom: ***The starboard 15-ton anchor.***





NEXT ISSUE

USS SOUTH DAKOTA

Because of its exploits against the Japanese in the South Pacific, this mighty battleship became a legend before she was a year old when her heroics were reported in newspapers under the titles of 'Battleship X' and 'Old Nameless'

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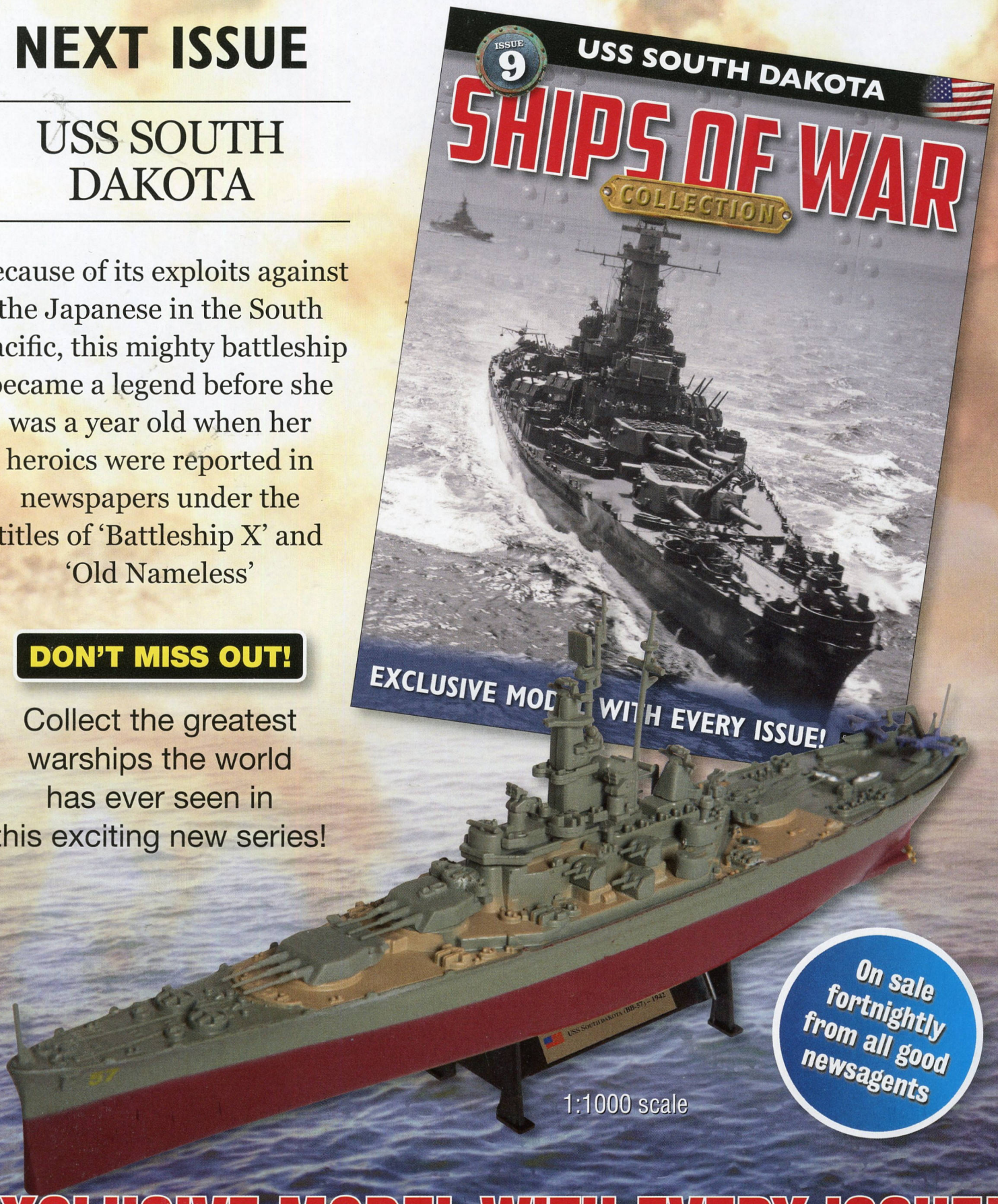

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